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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: NO MOVEMENT IN SIGHT ON PEACE TALKS WITH FARC AND
ELN

Classified By: Political Counselor John Creamer
Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) Peace Commissioner Restrepo told us there will likely be no movement on peace talks with the FARC until the first half of 2009 at the earliest, adding that talks with the ELN also remain "highly doubtful." FARC leader Alfonso Cano is focused on consolidating internal control of the group, and the ELN is increasingly tied to the FARC through their common strategic partner--Venezuela. Restrepo expects the FARC to make a proposal in 2009 in an attempt to influence the 2010 Colombian presidential elections and exploit a perceived USG interest in a peace process. Catholic Church intermediary Father Echeverri told us civil society feels an obligation to try to revive ELN talks, but is not optimistic. He told us Restrepo, who recently the mooted the possibility of retirement, appears exhausted and "without any new ideas" on the FARC or ELN. End summary.

NO MOVEMENT ON FARC TALKS

2. (U) Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo said in an October 13 "El Tiempo" interview that there are "no ongoing GOC conversations" with the FARC, and that FARC chief Alfonso Cano is focused on reinforcing his position as the group's military chief. He added that he "saw little FARC interest" in a possible humanitarian exchange of FARC hostages for jailed FARC members. Restrepo also mooted his possible retirement, noting that he would like to resume the freedom of private life.

3. (C) Privately, Restrepo told us there will be no movement on talks with the FARC for at least six months. FARC mid-level commanders in Valle de Cauca and assistants to Cano and fellow Secretariat member Pablo Catatumbo have met with GOC-authorized messenger Henry Acosta, but rebuffed Acosta's requests for a meeting--citing security concerns. Restrepo said Cano is concentrating on consolidating his control over the FARC and managing Mono Jojoy, modernizing the group's terrorist apparatus, and strengthening the position of loyal commanders--especially Catatumbo and Ivan Marquez. Cano is also working to reorganize FARC finances, set specific operational goals for commanders, and rebuild the FARC's political apparatus.

4. (C) Restrepo added that Operation Jaque, which freed 13 hostages including Ingrid Betancourt and three Americans in

July, helped Cano bolster his internal position by putting Jojoy on the defensive. He added that Cano also devotes considerable effort to cultivating ties with radical Venezuelan figures including former-Interior Minister Ramon Rodriguez Chacin. Restrepo said Rodriguez Chacin and other Venezuelan radical continue to see the FARC as an integral part of the GOV's Bolivarian strategy. Vice Defense Minister Sergio Jaramillo concurred, telling us the GOC continues to support the FARC at the same time it asks FARC members to train Venezuelans in irregular warfare.

FARC'S LIKELY NEXT MOVES

15. (C) Restrepo speculated that the FARC will likely make a peace proposal in the first half of 2009 in an attempt to influence Colombia's 2010 presidential elections and to exploit a perceived U.S. interest in starting a peace process. He noted that in 2006 the FARC tried to support Alvaro Leyva's presidential bid; the group would likely support Piedad Cordoba in 2010. He said peace advocates such as Moritz Akerman continue to advise the FARC that a new U.S. administration will try to promote GOC-FARC peace talks. Restrepo stressed that the GOC does not believe the FARC is interested in serious peace talks, but said the GOC will be prepared with initiatives to maintain the tactical advantage. The worst outcome would be for the FARC to trap the GOC into a peace process that relieves military pressure on the group but does not produce a cease-fire and FARC demobilization.

16. (C) Restrepo said GOC efforts to persuade individual FARC fronts or blocs to demobilize en masse have failed to date,

since the group retains sufficient internal discipline --as well as fear--among its commanders. GOC military pressure has reached a tipping point in terms of the FARC's military capacity, but has not broken the Secretariat's will to fight.

The FARC maintains sufficient capacity to launch major terrorist strikes, and its leaders believe the current economic crisis and continued Venezuelan support will enable it to remain a viable force. In this context, recent U.S. sanctions against Rodriguez Chacin and other senior GOV security officials were very useful for the GOC. Restrepo said he hopes the USG will publicly sanction more GOV officials in the near future.

ELN TALKS DOUBTFUL

17. (C) Restrepo said a renewal of GOC talks with the ELN is highly doubtful. The ELN is increasingly linked to the FARC through the two groups' common strategic partner--Venezuela. Catholic Church peace intermediary Father Dario Echeverri told us separately that Restrepo originally hoped to use ELN talks as a hook to start negotiations with the FARC. Given the ELN's continued intransigence, the GOC has now shifted its focus to the larger terrorist group.

GOC OUT OF IDEAS ON FARC AND ELN

18. (C) Echeverri lamented that Restrepo appears exhausted and "without any new ideas" on the FARC or ELN. He said the Civil Society Facilitation Commission for the ELN process met on October 7 to consider ways to revive ELN talks. The Commission decided that--in light of the emerging "FARC-political investigations"--it would seek GOC approval to meet with jailed ELN commander Juan Carlos Cuellar to pitch a proposal that would involve the ELN releasing some kidnap victims to lay the groundwork for an eventual meeting between Restrepo and ELN Central Command (COCE) members Pablo Beltran and Antonio Garcia. Echeverri conceded that prospects for success are slim, but he said the Commission feels obligated to continue making proposals.

19. (C) Echeverri added that he met with Henry Acosta in late September in Bogota. Acosta received a letter from Catatumbo (Acosta's main contact) in which Catatumbo said neither he nor Cano could meet with Acosta. Catatumbo reportedly instructed Acosta to forward any GOC peace proposals to the

FARC for "evaluation." Acosta told Echeverri that when he conveyed this message to Peace Commissioner Restrepo, Restrepo was "very disappointed," and speculated there might "no longer be any point in maintaining a Peace Commissioner's office."

BROWNFIELD